

# Noxubee News



Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge News

Issue 11

Spring 2003

## Red-cockaded Woodpecker Impacted By West Nile Disease?



*Photo by Jim Pruitt*

The Refuge population of the endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker took a turn in the downward direction in 2002. From the spring count of 78 birds on the refuge, a decline to a fall population of 74 birds was recorded. Though this was only 4 birds, it means that none of the reproduction from spring appeared to have survived. In addition, several active clusters with adults and young became inactive and other groups had 1 or more birds disappear from spring to fall.

One theory on the decline is possible effects from West Nile Disease. To investigate this theory, blood samples from 24 birds have been taken and sent

to the Madison Wildlife Health Lab in Wisconsin. This blood test will determine if these birds have been exposed to WND. If some birds are found with the antigen to the disease, it suggests that WND might be a cause of the decline. However, if no birds test positive for past exposure, two explanations can be forwarded. The first explanation: no birds were exposed to the disease and the decline is from something else. The second explanation: that although no birds test positive for WND past exposure, all birds that previously got the disease died and are no longer in the population. Researchers know that nearly 95% of Crows exposed to WND die. Hopefully, this is not the case with the Red-cockaded Woodpecker. An update on the results of the blood sampling and the spring 2003 count of RCW on the Refuge will come in our next newsletter.



*Eagle nest as viewed from helicopter  
March 24, 2003*

## Eagle Nest Discovered

A pair of Bald Eagles were discovered nesting on the Refuge on March 24! This is the first confirmed nesting since the 1950's. The nest, located in the top of a tall pine, was discovered by a helicopter crew involved in prescribed burning operations. The nest is located in the forest south of the Smith Field; however, the area around the nest has

been closed to the public to prevent disturbance to birds. Although Bald Eagles might soon be taken off the endangered species list, they will still be protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Bald Eagle Act.



A follow-up flight was done on June 5, and one eaglet, almost ready to fledge, was observed. The Refuge is ecstatic about discovering the nest, and more so that it has produced a young eagle. Hopefully the eagles will be permanent residents.



## Road Update

Refuge roads continue to improve. Work planned for this summer revolves around paving a seven-mile section of the Brooksville/Louisville Road from the Betheden cemetery to the Winston-Noxubee County line. This coupled, with paving of Loakfoma Road out to Hwy 25, will give the public improved access from the four-lane highway. The old surplus metal bridges across the Noxubee River are also scheduled for replacement.

## Friends of Noxubee Refuge

As of May 1, 2003, the Friends Of Noxubee Refuge (FONR) is a formal organization. The by-laws have been passed, the articles of incorporation adopted, and a mission statement accepted. The board members are working on finalizing the non-profit status of the group.

The first project of FONR will be assisting the Refuge with the Fishing Derby on June 21. If you are interested in joining this organization in support of Refuge activities, contact the Refuge office for more information.



## New Office/Visitor Center

Construction of the new Office/Visitor Center continues well on schedule. By end of May the building was sheathed and dried-in such that indoor contractors (i.e. electrical, drywall, HVAC) can proceed. One slow down was excavation of the driveway and parking lot area. The contractor found the spongy soil in these areas continued much deeper than expected. Because the spongy soil would not support the planned driveway/parking area, the contractor will have to excavate an additional two feet of material and backfill with filter fabric and crushed gravel. Fortunately there is contingency money to cover this unexpected change.

Refuge staff met twice with another contractor who is developing exhibits for the building. Preliminary plans have been developed, focusing on major habitat themes such as wetlands, upland forests, and prairies. The exhibits should be of the highest quality as the contractor has an excellent reputation.

In addition to exhibits, filming has started on a video of the Refuge. Hopefully we will see the building completed by the end of November.



## Quail Management Workshop Held

A Quail Management Workshop was held at the Noxubee Conservation Center on March 30, co-sponsored by the Refuge, Mississippi State University, and the Oktibbeha County Chapter of Quail Unlimited. The workshop was a huge success with approximately 100 people attending.

Bobwhite quail are one of several wildlife species hurt by the slow loss of early successional habitat. Other species such as meadow larks, loggerhead shrikes, and cottontail rabbits have all suffered as old fields and weedy pastures are gradually converted to improved pastures and pine plantations.

Judging by the workshop's attendance, there is much interest in restoring this type of habitat and the wildlife dependent on it. Attendees learned not only about quail ecology and habitat needs, they also heard presentations on how to utilize Farm Bill programs and how to write habitat management plans.

Watch this newsletter for announcements on similar wildlife management workshops in the future.

## Morgan Hill Restoration

Many Refuge visitors have noticed the heavy equipment working near the Morgan Hill Overlook. The work is part of an effort to restore native plants on the prairie soils around Morgan Hill. This area contains the Refuge's best remnants of Blackbelt Prairie soils and its plant communities. However, about 20 years ago pines were planted on part of these prairie soils. These trees were located on the northeast side of the Morgan Hill parking lot. The heavy equipment has been removing the trees and stumps—a necessary first step to restoring the grasses and wildflowers native to the prairie soils.



Future plans will likely involve a mixture of planting seeds and seedlings to restore native species, along with leaving some areas alone to let native plants re-colonize on their own. Keep an eye on the area, as the restoration will be a slow but steady process.







Jarmarcus Bash



Dontel Kelly

## Staff Notes

On June 2<sup>nd</sup> our staff was increased by four Youth Conservation Corps enrollees. The four young men and women are all from Starkville: Jarmarcus Bash, Dontel Kelly, Ursala Logan, and Donisha Mobley. One of the first jobs they helped us with was stocking catfish in the spillway pool for the fishing Derby (see pictures).

They will be working closely with a new YCC Leader from Ackerman, David Busby.



Ursala Logan



Donisha Mobley

## Refuge Plans Public Meeting

A public meeting will be held on June 26 from 7-9 p.m. at the Noxubee Conservation Center at 2637 Bluff Lake Road.

The Fish and Wildlife Service has developed a draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan to guide the management of the Refuge of the next 15 years and welcome any comments from the public on topics such as fish and wildlife populations, habitat management, land acquisition and protection, cultural resources and education/visitor services.

If you cannot attend the event, you may still submit comments via mail or telephone by July 21 to be considered. For more information, call 323-5548

## Calendar of Events

**September 5 and 26: Night Walk and Owl Prowl** - Come visit the Refuge after hours and see/hear some of the nocturnal wildlife. Call the Refuge Office for more information. Reservations are required and space is limited.



*Yellow-Crowned Night Heron*  
Photo by Jim Pruitt

**July 26: Canoe Trip through the Bluff Lake cattle egret rookery:** The annual canoe trips through the cattle egret rookery have been scheduled. We do not want to disturb the nesting egrets and herons; so, we will be conducting the trip as they come in to roost. It will also be near the end of their nesting season. Please call for more information and to reserve a canoe. Space is limited.

## Comments?

*If there are topics you would like included in the next issue, please feel free to contact us and suggest topics. If you would like to contribute an article or information concerning partners or projects (present or future) on the Refuge, please let us know. This newsletter is provided free to all interested persons, and if you would like to be added to the mailing list please contact us. You can call us at 662/323-5548, check out our website at <http://Noxubee.fws.gov> or email us [Noxubee@fws.gov](mailto:Noxubee@fws.gov).*



*It is summer once again, and the time to see the alligators!  
Photo by Jim Pruitt*

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